

Ambiente: Feedback from Frankfurt

By [Dave Nemeth](#)

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Ambiente is one of the leading trade fairs showcasing design across dining, giving and living.



The expo is visited by around 136,000 trade visitors from 143 countries and is one of the best platforms of what we can start to expect in retail outlets around the world. The most notable thing I noticed walking the vast aisles of the expo is that I *didn't* notice any mind-blowing changes or exciting trend directions in the design of items. It is almost as if consumers have become content with the design we have become accustomed to over recent years and designers are struggling to really push boundaries on a creative front.

After several hours, and paying more attention to detail, there are some interesting things taking shape with the way in which designers are working and the focus that some leading brands are taking. The first of these is a **fine attention to detail** and whilst this may be seen by many leading authorities as adaptation and not design innovation, I do think it is an important factor that highlights the current values of today's consumer. This attention to detail sees a refinement in the way in which items are manufactured. Fine joinery and quality materials stand up against mass production as the focus seems to be on longevity, moving radically away from anything disposable. We even see traditional joinery taking place with wooden furniture, which seems to have become a lost art of recent years.

Humour and age-old tradition

On the subject of lost art, the Japanese whom have been relatively stagnant on the design front for some years now, (though there have been a few exceptions like Nendo) really seem to be producing some exciting work. Most of the designs on display, although contemporary, explore age-old traditions of manufacture. This includes techniques of dying, blade-making and, of course ceramics with various different types of clay. One of these is what is referred to as 'Bizen ware', which has a history of over a thousand years. This is pottery which is fired without glazing, allowing for unexpected colour variations and surface effects. Japanese design really needs to be worked with a close eye over the next few years, as I think a lot of mainstream trend direction will emerge from what we are starting to see.



Big name brands like Alessi and Stelton were two of the only big name brands that really stood out, with Stelton producing ranges in dusty green, sand and light grey; a very fresh approach for such an iconic brand. Alessi, who are the masters of bringing humour into their design have teamed up with designer extraordinaire Marcel Wanders for their new range titled 'Circus'. Using bold, geometric patterns of circles, stripes, conic shapes, and colours such as white, black, yellow, red and gold, each piece reminds of historical symbols from the circus universe resonating an experience of wonder and amusement. There were many other designers bringing humour into their designs and quirky typography adorned many items.

The combination of materials was another noticeable direction, with wood, glass, metal and a host of recycled substrates brought together to create some interesting items. It is good to see that there is still some experimentation taking place and hopefully designers and manufacturers will continue pushing hard on the innovation front. The biggest trend at Ambiente this year was a Scandinavian influence across products and furniture. This is by no means a new trend, as the past five years have seen the re-emergence of this style but it now seems to be heading for its peak as it finds its way into many mainstream retailers around the world. This refinement in styling really did push the industrial look we have become so accustomed to aside this year.

Overall, Ambiente pulled out all the stops and is a necessary list annually for anyone in the design and retail industries.

[Click here](#) for more on Ambiente and be sure to follow the hashtag #Ambiente17 for the latest updates.

ABOUT DAVE NEMETH

A leading blue chip international company recently identified Dave as one of the top creative influencers in the country. Dave Nemeth is a qualified designer who has held a variety of senior as well as executive positions with some of the countries leading retail groups, spanning a career of twenty years. Email Dave at daven@worldonline.co.za, follow @davenemeth on Twitter and connect on Facebook.

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